

For Performance or Sport: *The space matters*

Four large spaces are vital to the daily life of a high school: the **library, cafeteria, auditorium and gym**. Because of the nature and size of these spaces, they become major drivers of square footage, design layout and cost in any new or renovated school facility.

While the size and type of library and cafeteria are driven principally by enrollment, the size and type of auditorium and gymnasium are driven not only by enrollment, but also by during-the-day and extracurricular programming. The capability of these spaces dictates the type of programs and the number of participants that can be accommodated. Therefore, significant effort has gone into identifying spaces needed for the performing arts and athletics elements of the Educational Program.

Performing Arts: “To be or not to be” is not the question

Wellesley High School (WHS) has award-winning and highly acclaimed drama, instrumental and choral music programs. In the last 10 years, the Performing Arts Program has grown from a few classes to a program with 5 choral groups, 4 band/jazz band groups, 1 orchestra and 4 different drama courses. Over 400 students participate in Performing Arts Classes, and per class enrollment ranges from 15 to over 50 students. In addition, hundreds of students participate in extensive after-school activities, including the fall musical, two plays, the drama society and several ensemble groups.

Performing Arts spaces currently include the auditorium, backstage, a choral room, a band/orchestra room and practice rooms. All are utilized to full capacity during school hours and highly utilized after school hours. Participation in Performing Arts is an important experience for students, and the participant numbers already exceed the capabilities of the current facility.

When built in 1938, the auditorium accommodated the entire student body. The new *Massachusetts School Building Authority* (MSBA) standard suggests an auditorium seat half the anticipated student body, or 750 students at the projected peak enrollment for WHS. The existing auditorium has 645 seats. It has inadequate lighting, acoustics and back-stage spaces. Significant and costly renovations would be required to bring the auditorium up to compliance with *American with Disabilities Act* (ADA) and to increase the seating to the 750-seat standard and would still yield inadequate production capabilities. Also, renovating the auditorium would result in the loss of the use of an auditorium and performing arts spaces for 1-2 school years and would necessitate finding alternative spaces for the Performing Arts Educational Program.

To support the Performing Arts Educational Program, School Committee has determined the following:

- To enable the curriculum and meet student participation demand, expanded Performing Arts spaces are needed: a larger band/orchestra room, a larger choral room, a drama room, a multi-purpose/dance room, and instrument storage. Support spaces should be located adjacent to the auditorium for efficient performer access and practical set management.
- An assembly space large enough to accommodate half of the student body at one time (750) is appropriate and would be potentially eligible for the state reimbursement program.
- Development of a well-functioning auditorium would have community-wide use potential.

- The existing auditorium could be renovated for other educational purposes.

Athletic Facilities: *Fit for fitness*

The High School Fitness and Athletic facilities include the gymnasiums, locker rooms, fitness center and multi-purpose rooms (for wrestling, aerobics, yoga and dance). Wellesley requires five semesters of fitness/health classes for all high school students. Approximately 800 WHS students are enrolled in fitness/health classes each semester. Last year throughout three athletic seasons, there were 1,247 WHS student athletes with 26 organized teams. More than 70% of our high school students participate on at least one team.

Wellesley High School presently has two gymnasiums, the original 1938 gym and the 1963 Larsson gym. Both gyms are in need of renovation. The lighting is poor, the floors are in need of replacement, and there is insufficient storage for fitness and athletic equipment. The 1938 gym is not ADA compliant. Still, with these limitations, they marginally serve the needs of the current fitness and health curricula and competitive athletic programs. However, as enrollment increases, these spaces will be increasingly inadequate.

For fitness/health classes and athletics, the facilities must accommodate both the breadth of courses and increasing participation. For competitive athletics, the gym must provide adequate facilities for girls and boys team practices and for competitions that require indoor spaces (basketball, volleyball, wrestling, dance and cheerleading), and indoor track team practices. It should accommodate outdoor sports activities when the weather prohibits outdoor practice.

Considering various alternatives, the School Committee decided on a configuration that enables the Fitness and Athletic Program and is the standard for a comparable suburban school:

- A single gym of sufficient size to be screened or partitioned into three practice courts (an increase of 12% square footage to meet the enrollment increases);
- Sufficient bleacher seating to accommodate varsity level competition;
- An elevated, four lane indoor running track around the perimeter for fitness training, not competition, and an indoor climbing wall; and
- Associated facilities to include locker rooms, fitness center, multipurpose spaces, storage and offices.

The large spaces matter. They facilitate critical components of the *Educational and Extracurricular Programs* and provide all students with the opportunity to realize the benefits of Performing Arts and Athletics Programs.

Suzanne Littlefield is a School Committee Member and on the School Building Committee.